POPULAR PSYCHOLOGY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
CONTEMPORARY INSPIRATIONAL NONRELIGIOUS BOOKS

by

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This paper attempts to determine the prevalent themes
of the contemporary popular inspirational literature. It
uses as a point of departure the preliminary draft by Dr.
Samuel Z. Klausner, "A Collocation of Concepts of Self-
Control." As part of his search of the self-help literature,
Dr. Klausner studied ten general self-help books, as well as
a large number of works oriented towards control of dietary
and sexual problems. The latest copyright on any of the
general self-help works was 1941, with 1902-1903 as the
median date of publication. As an extended replication of
his research, I have selected for study general self-help
works currently available in bookstores and in the many
places which purvey paperback books. Every one of these
works was written after World War II or has been recently
published as a paperback.

During the summer of 1962, these books were on sale in
Rochester, New York; Ithaca, New York; and Syracuse, New
York. The criteria for inclusion in the sample are both
positive and negative. I sought works addressed directly
to the reader for his action toward self-improvement. They must
not emphasize sex, diet or religion. The exclusion of reli-
gious works is designed to prevent overlap with an earlier
work by Schneider and Dornbusch, Popular Religion. Every
outlet for books and paperbacks in Rochester and Ithaca was
visited, and the 49 books found are representative of current-
ly available general self-help literature.

The following additional negative criteria were used
to produce a more homogeneous set of works which would then
be content-analyzed. These criteria were employed during a
perusal of the contents of each of the works. Appendix B
lists the works eliminated. The negative criteria were:

1. The work was not written by Americans.

2. The book was written by more than two authors.

3. The book is oriented toward women.

4. The work is addressed to adolescents or to the aged.

5. The emphasis is upon manipulation of others as an
    object in itself rather than toward change of the
    self.

6. The book does not make frequent suggestions that the reader perform actions.

7. The book is a popularized text on elementary psychology or psychoanalysis or psychiatry.

8. The book seeks to teach self-analysis in a psychoanalytic sense.

9. The single major theme is control of fatigue.

10. The single major theme is creativity.

11. The book is concerned with a single performance activity such as public speaking or salesmanship.

12. The author already has a book in our sample (random choice).

Appendix A lists the remaining fifteen works which were to be content-analyzed. They were read in random order so that changes in the coding behavior of the reader would not be associated with any specific type of volume.

The coding categories are reproduced in Appendix C. They are the product of three sources:

1. Implicit or explicit categories in Dr. Klausner's collocation.

2. The category scheme used in Popular Religion.

3. Categories especially created for the purposes of this study.

Reliability tests are now being performed on the coding of the fifteen books. Given this lack of tested reliability, the necessary ambiguities of reading and coding, and a small sample of fifteen works, it is obvious that the findings reported in this paper are necessarily tentative.

The numerical code is a modification of the global coding recommended in Popular Religion, pp. 166-167. The reader notes the first instance of the appearance of a particular theme. There may be more than one theme in a page or paragraph. The first appearance of a theme is recorded, but no further data are required until the complete book has been read. Then the coder records the relative importance of each

theme in this volume on a four point scale:

0	Absent
1	Some attention to this theme
2	Considerable attention to this them
3	Major theme of this volume.

Unless otherwise noted, the analysis which follows relates themes only to books for which they are coded 2 or 3.

METHODS OF SELF-CONTROL

The authors of these works have a problem: how to assist persons in an imperfect world where the ends of action are neither certain nor universally desired. Faced with the need to motivate the reader to act and to give him some feeling of confidence in his action, a reasonable approach emphasizes the response of the organism. "Positive thinking" is central to nine of these self-help books. (IA1, IA2, IA3) Here the response of the organism to the environment is used to structure the world in accordance with a theme of uplift. But positive thinking alone is seldom employed. Let us illustrate the variety of methods suggested by listing authors in terms of our categorization of methods.

Positive thinking - Lurton, Schindler, Chase

Positive thinking plus control of the subconscious-
(IA1b) - Maltz, Bristol

Positive thinking plus control of the subconscious plus
engaging the threat (IC) - Powers, Albert

Positive thinking plus control of the subconscious
plus cognitive mediation (ID), plus selection of the
environment (IB) - Hill

Positive thinking plus engaging the threat plus cognitive
mediation - Terhune

Control of the subconscious, plus engaging the threat
plus cognitive mediation - Hart

Control of the subconscious plus selection of the en-
vironment plus cognitive mediation - Fink

Engaging the threat plus cognitive mediation - Bisch
and Ray

Engaging the threat - Carnegie, Reilly

This list illustrates the surprising heterogeneity of methods of control employed in what appears to be a unitary self-help orientation. Approaches range from the kitchen sink of Hill to the single mindedness of Carnegie and Reilly.

It is easy to look at the positive-thinking notion as
a childish American attempt to impose the search for happi-
ness as a perceptual category upon the unyielding objects
of man's environment. I have been surprised to note that
the seemingly obvious connection between emphasis upon posi-
tive thinking and low intellectual quality simply does not
hold. Among the more reasonable and realistic works are
those of Schindler and Terhune, two of the four psychiatrists,
and they both stress positive thinking as a method of chang-
ing the self. The relation of positive thinking to the struc-
ture of self-help is certainly more complicated than expected.

As is pointed out by Klausner, the emphasis upon the indi-
vidual's response to the world may be a function of a general
approach which treats the organism rather than the environ-
ment. Associated with positive thinking as a recommended
method for the readers are three examples of positive think-
ing by the authors. Thus, five out of nine positive-thinking
authors ask the reader to set his aspirations very high (VIII F),
while only one out of the remaining six authors requests that
the reader set a high level of aspiration.

The confidence of the author (his positive thinking?) is
also shown by the belief of six of the nine positive-thinking
authors that their advice always is effective if followed
(IXA, IXB). Only two of the six remaining negative-thinkers
about positive-thinking set that same high standard for their
advice.

We find that the positive thinkers are again positive in
promising happiness to all who follow the prescribed regimen
(VA4). Six out of nine positively oriented works give this
theme considerable attention, while only two out of the re-
maining six emphasize this theme. We may analyze the data
from another standpoint. A somewhat negative theme states
that both happiness and unhappiness are to be expected even
by a diligent reader (VC). Using a less restrictive criterion,
noting any case (1, 2, or 3) in which the author observes the
non-Pollyanna qualities of a human environment, we can count
the books that give a single mention to this category. Three
of the nine positive-thinking books mention such unhappiness,
while three of the six remaining works also note that unhappi-
ness is a possibility. The relationship here is slight, but
in the proper direction. It is worthy of note that all four
psychiatrists (Bisch, Schindler, Terhune and Fink) mention
that unhappiness is to be expected by all men.

MAGIC

Categories IVB4, IVB5, IVC4, and IVC5 can provide an operational definition of magic. They portray thought as both affecting and forecasting physical and social events. In a world in which we all share many superstitions and prejudices, it is a pleasure to be able to state objectively that three of these works are high in their orientation toward magical processes, without worrying about biases influencing the researcher. The works of Bristol, Hill, and Chase clearly differ from the other works by emphasizing unknowable extrasensory processes. Perhaps they are right, but there is no harm in my labeling them as different in kind. These three works are remarkably consistent. They exhort the reader to have a very high level of aspiration, three out of three stressing this theme, while only three of the remaining twelve works do so. If we look at VIIIA3, which relates aspirations to individual capabilities, none of these authors stress that theme, while six of the remaining twelve books employ it. Finally, if we combine VIIIA3 and VIIIA4, so that aspirations are related to capabilities or to both capabilities and the social situation, we continue to find that the three magical works set no limit for their readers' guidance, while eight of the remaining twelve do ask for some reality testing.

MANIFEST OBJECTS OF CONTROL

Klausner has stated that, "The self-help literature is particularly concerned with drive control. This may derive, in part, from its moralistic attitude toward physiological drives and, in part, from this literature's concern with task accomplishment. The popular interpretation suggests that uncontrolled drives interfere with the accomplishment of higher tasks. Books on diet and sex control within the self-help literature inflate the drive category."

The content analysis performed here supports only the caveat in Dr. Klausner's last sentence. It is simply not true that the self-help literature is concerned with drive control (IIB). The control of physiological or psychological drives is a theme in only five of the fifteen works. Three of these five are written by psychiatrists in the sample. Ray, taking an Adlerian view, joins the psychiatrists, while Hill is the only representative of popular moralistic concern. Hill sees sex as necessarily sublimated in order to accomplish the higher ends of life, such as earning money. Therefore, two-thirds of our works do not stress drive control, and the "popular" moral concern is found only in one work.

If drive control is not central to this literature, then what are the manifest objects of control? Three of the works stress performance (IIA), ten emphasize intellectual or cognitive functions (IIC), and <u>fourteen</u> stress the control of emotion or affect (IID). The only exception is Powers, who is almost completely concerned with intellectual functions as a means towards achieving success.

In our content-analysis, the control of affect or emotion is broken down to include as an additional set of categories the relation of self to social objects, physical objects (IID2), or cultural objects (IID3). Twelve of the fourteen works in this area stress control of emotion <u>per se</u>, while Bristol and Reilly only consider affective relations of the self to these objects. It may be expressive of American other-directedness or emphasis on social interaction that every one of these fourteen works gives considerable attention to the relation of the self to other persons. Two works relate the self to physical objects and are magical in their orientation. The four which emphasize relations to cultural objects are discussing such diverse phenomena as money, conformity, and religious orientations.

TYPES OF EFFORT

Klausner's finding of an association between the self-help literature and conquest (IIIB) is here confirmed. Fourteen out of fifteen works stress this theme. Klausner is also correct in his belief that the self-help literature is not oriented toward harmony (IIIC) or transcendence (IIID). Only the work of two of our four psychiatrists use these themes. (Klausner has noted a relationship between psychoanalysis and the emphasis upon transcendence and harmony.) Bisch strongly endorses both and Terhune seeks to promote the effort toward harmony. Nine of the fifteen books have not a single mention of these notions.

Klausner has stated that the synergic approach is stressed in the self-help literature. It is a powerful theme in this sample only for Hill and Terhune. But before scrapping Klausner's belief, we should note that the theme appears at least once in eleven out of the fifteen books.

In his collocation Dr. Klausner links the effort to conquer with the attempt to control physiological and psychological drives. In this sample, as noted above, fourteen of our fifteen works use conquest as a central type of effort. It is of interest that Bisch, one of only five authors who emphasize drive control, does not stress conquest. He appeals for efforts toward harmony and transcendence.

It is possible that the association reported by Dr. Klausner is based on a general tendency of self-help literature per se. The sample he used included many works on diet and sex, which would emphasize drive control, and it is conceivable that a general tendency of all self-help literature might be perceived as relating to drive control itself. Dr. Klausner could settle this issue by cross-classification of his data.

SUMMARY

This paper reports an extensive replication of Dr. Klausner's analysis of the self-help literature. The tentative findings indicate that the self-help works are not unitary, but range from sheer magic to reasoned products of human experience. With this somewhat more homogeneous sample of books, it was possible to analyze the data in terms of Dr. Klausner's theoretical orientation. The findings support the fruitfulness of his classification scheme. It is clear that analysis of inspirational works can provide a foundation for the study of societal assumptions about the individual's relation to his world.

APPENDIX A

WORKS CONTENT-ANALYZED

Albert, Dora, _You're Better than You Think._ Englewood Cliffs,
New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957. (Hardcover)

Bisch, Louis E., B.A., M.D., Ph.D., _Cure Your Nerves Your-
self: How Understanding Yourself Can Bring Peace of
Mind._ Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, revised
1957. (Paperback)

Bristol, Claude M., _The Magic of Believing._ New York: Pren-
tice Hall, 1948. (Hardcover)

Carnegie, Dale, _How to Stop Worrying and Start Living._
New York Pocket Books, 1961; earlier published by
Simon and Schuster, 1948. (Paperback)

Chase, Jo Anne (as told to Constance Moon), _You Can Change
Your Life Through Psychic Power._ New York: Permabooks,
1960. (Paperback)

Fink, David Harold, M.D., _Release From Nervous Tension._
New York: Simon & Schuster, Revised Edition, 1953.
(Hardcover)

Hart, Hornell, Ph.D., _Autoconditioning: The New Way to a
Successful Life._ Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Pren-
tice-Hall, 1956. (Hardcover)

Hill, Napoleon, _Think and Grow Rich._ Greenwich, Conn:
Fawcett Publications, Revised Edition 1960; earlier
edition, 1937. (Paperback)

Lurton, Douglas, _The Power of Positive Living._ Greenwich,
Conn: Fawcett Publications, no date, originally New
York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1950. (Paperback)

Maltz, Maxwell, M.D., _Psycho-Cybernetics: A New Way to
Get More Living Out of Life._ Englewood Cliffs, New
Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960. (Hardcover)

Powers, Melvin, _Dynamic Thinking: The Technique for
Achieving Self-Confidence and Success._ Hollywood,
California: Wilshire Book Co., 1955. (Paperback)

Ray, Marie Beynon, _The Importance of Feeling Inferior._ New
York: Ace Books, 1957. (Paperback)

Reilly, William J., Ph.D., <u>How to Get What You Want Out of Life.</u> Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957. (Hardcover)

Schindler, John A., M.D., <u>How to Live 365 Days a Year.</u> New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954. (Hardcover)

Terhune, William B., M.D., <u>Emotional Problems and What You Can Do About Them.</u> New York: William Morrow & Co., 1955.

APPENDIX B

WORKS NOW ON SALE BUT EXCLUDED FROM CONTENT-ANALYSIS SAMPLE

Banks, Murray, How To Live With Yourself. New York: Pren-
    tice-Hall, 1951.

Bergler, Edmund, M.D., Tensions Can Be Reduced to Nuisances:
    A Technique for Not-Too-Neurotic People. New York:
    Collier Books, 1962; earlier Liveright, 1960.

Binstock, Louis, The Road to Successful Living. New York:
    Simon and Schuster, 1958.

Bisch, B.A., M.D., Ph.D., Be Glad You're Neurotic. New
    York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Second Revised Edition,
    1946.

Carnegie, Dale, How to Develop Self-Confidence and Influence
    People by Public Speaking. New York: Pocket Books,
    1956, revised from Public Speaking and Influencing
    Men in Business. Association Press, 1926.

Carnegie, Dale, How To Win Friends and Influence People.
    New York: Pocket Books, 1959; earlier published by
    Simon and Schuster, 1936.

Carnegie, Mrs. Dale, How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead.
    New York: Pyramid Books, 1957; originally 1953.

Chappell, Matthew N., Worry and Its Control. New York:
    Collier Books, 1949.

Coue, Emile and C. H. Brooks, Better and Better Every Day.
    New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961.

Davis, Maxine, Get the Most out of Your Best Years. New
    York: Permabooks, 1962; originally by Dial Press, 1960.

Dimnet, Ernest, The Art of Thinking. Greenwich, Conn.:
    Fawcett Publications (printed in 1962), earlier pub-
    lished by Simon & Schuster, 1928.

Duvall, Sylvanus M., S.T.M., Ph.D., The Art and Skill of
    Getting Along People. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:
    Prentice-Hall, 1961.

Giblin, Les, <u>How to Have Confidence and Power in Dealing With People.</u> Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1956.

Gracian, Balthasar, <u>The Art of Worldly Wisdom.</u> New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., originally 1892; no date for this printing.

Kraines, S. H., M.D., and E. S. Thetford, <u>Live and Help Live.</u> New York: Macmillan Company, 1951.

Lackner, Stephan, Dr., <u>Discover Your Self: A Practical Guide to Autoanalysis.</u> Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1956.

Laird, Donald A., Ph.D., Sc.D., <u>Increasing Personal Efficiency</u>

Lees, Hannah, <u>Help Your Husband Stay Alive.</u> New York: Collier Books, 1962; originally 1957.

Lindgren, Henry Clay, <u>How to Live with Yourself and Like It.</u> Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1958; earlier published 1953 by Hermitage House.

Lucas, F. L. <u>The Art of Living.</u> New York: Macmillan, 1961; earlier copyright 1959.

Mager, N. H. and S. K., Editors, <u>A Guide to Better Living.</u> New York: Permabooks, 1959; earlier published by Affiliated Publishers, 1957.

Mangan, James T., <u>The Knack of Selling Yourself.</u> New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1947.

Osborn, Alex, <u>Your Creative Power.</u> New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1961; earlier published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

Overstreet, Bonara W., <u>Understanding Fear in Ourselves and Others.</u> New York: Collier Books, 1962.; earlier Harper and Brothers, 1951.

Overstreet, H. A., <u>About Ourselves: Psychology for Normal People.</u> New York: W. W. Norton, 1927.

Overstreet, H. A., _The Mature Mind._ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1949.

Overstreet, Harry and Bonaro, _The Mind Alive._ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1954.

Palmer, Stuart, _Understanding Other People._ Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1959; earlier published by Thomas Y. Crowell, 1955.

Russell, Bertrand, _The Conquest of Happiness._ Avon Book; originally 1930, Horace Liveright Co.

Seaburg, David, _Keep Your Wits._ New York: Whittlesey House, 1935.

Sherman, Harold, _Your Key to Happiness._ New York: Fawcett Publications, 1956; earlier published by G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1935, 1943, 1944.

Smith, Ethel Sarbin, _The Dynamics of Aging._ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1956.

Sperling, Dr. Abraham P., _How to Make Psychology Work for You._ Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1957.

Vermes, Hal G., _Senior Citizens' Guide to Better Living._ New York: Key Publishing, 1959.

APPENDIX C

CODING CATEGORIES

I. Methods of self-control

   A. Mental imagery to grasp consciousness and bend its power to the will

      1. Affirm the positive

         a. Imagine the end-result

         b. Control sub-conscious or unconscious processes in the desired direction

      2. Deny the negative

      3. Deny the negative by affirming the positive

   B. Selecting an environment which would have the desired impact on the self

   C. Engaging the threat and accepting a changed self as the result

   D. Cognitively mediating intra-psychic forces

II. Manifest objects of control

   A. Control overt performances by facilitating or inhibiting certain movements

   B. Control physiological or psychological drives by drive reduction or acting despite drive pressure

   C. Control intellectual or cognitive functions by facilitating thought or inhibiting troublesome thoughts

   D. Control affects or emotions, such as internal feeling states

      1. Control relation of self to social objects

      2. Control relation of self to physical objects

      3. Control relation of self to cultural objects

III. Types of effort

    A. Synergy

        1. Physically position the self to receive inputs from external systems, whether considered as stimuli, social relations, or symbolic

        2. Socially position the self to receive inputs from external systems, whether considered as stimuli, social relations, or symbolic

    B. Conquest

        1. Strengthening or weakening forces by a calculus of values

        2. Strengthening or weakening forces by concentration of energies

        3. Strengthening or weakening forces by practicing good habits and inhibiting bad habits

    C. Harmony - internal physical or psychological balance, integrating self under various environmental conditions

    D. Transcendence - internal dialectic synthesis which takes external systems into account

IV. Thought and reality

    A. Matter is illusion

    B. Matter is real but subservient to thought

        1. Absence of thought allows no influence from matter

        2. The cast of thought, positive or negative, decides the nature of the influence from matter

        3. The thought itself, by a form of the self-fulfilling prophecy, will affect outcomes

        4. Thought affects physical events by some extrasensory process

        5. Thoughts can foretell future physical states

C. Social relations are real but subservient to thought

1. Absence of thought allows no influence from social relations

2. The cast of thought, positive or negative, decides the nature of the social influence

3. The thought itself, by a form of the self-fulfilling prophecy, will affect outcomes

4. Thought affects social interaction by some extra-sensory process

5. Thoughts can foretell future social relationships

D. Matter is not subservient to thought

E. Social relations are not subservient to thought

V. Happiness and Unhappiness

A. Happiness

1. Happiness cannot be expected by any man

2. Happiness cannot be expected by most men

3. Happiness can be expected by most men who act in accordance with advice given in this book.

4. Happiness can be expected by all men who act in accordance with advice given in this book

B. Unhappiness

1. Unhappiness has divine significance

2. Unhappiness is a sign of environmental obstacles

3. Unhappiness is a sign of personal deficiencies

4. Unhappiness is a product of environmental obstacles and personal deficiencies

5. Unhappiness should be avoided and fought

C. Both happiness and unhappiness can be expected by all men who act in accordance with advice given in this book

VI. Sources of advice

    A. Personal experiences of the author

        1. In business

        2. In clinical practice

    B. Personal experiences of others

        1. Successful businessmen

        2. Scientists

            a. Natural scientists

            b. Behavioral scientists

            c. Clinicians

        3. Religious leaders

        4. Philosophers

        5. Heroes of sports and entertainment

        6. Other famous persons (government, exploration, art)

        7. Ordinary people

    C. Religious authority

        1. Christian

        2. Hebrew

        3. Other religious groups

        4. Non-institutional religion

    D. Scientific authority

        1. Natural science

        2. Behavioral scientists and clinicians

            a. Psychiatry and psychoanalysis

      b. Psychology

      c. Physicians

      d. Sociology

      e. Anthropology

      f. Other behavioral sciences

VII. Functions of God and religion

    A. God as Universal Mind or Infinite Intelligence, providing a storehouse of solutions to problems

    B. God as giver of great potential to each man

    C. God as healer, forgiver, and helper

VIII. Levels of aspiration

    A. Be satisfied with the status quo

    B. Set aspiration level moderately higher than current state

    C. Set aspiration level according to individual capability

    D. Set aspiration level according to individual capabilities and environmental situation

    E. Do not expect to achieve perfection

    F. Set a very high level of aspiration

IX. Certainty of improvement if advice is followed

    A. Advice, if taken, will always produce an improved state

    B. Improvement is certain, but not immediate, requiring continued effort

    C. Most persons will show improvement

D. Some persons will show improvement

E. Improvement may occur and no harm is possible